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# Ecosystem Management in the BLM

## Join the Community

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the Nation's steward for 270 million acres of public lands representing a wide variety of ecological systems (ecosystems)—from sun-drenched deserts of the arid Southwest, to lush old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest, to pristine Arctic tundra of Alaska.

The BLM has adopted the principles of ecosystem management as a new way to manage the public's lands and resources. Ecosystem management is about sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for present and future generations.

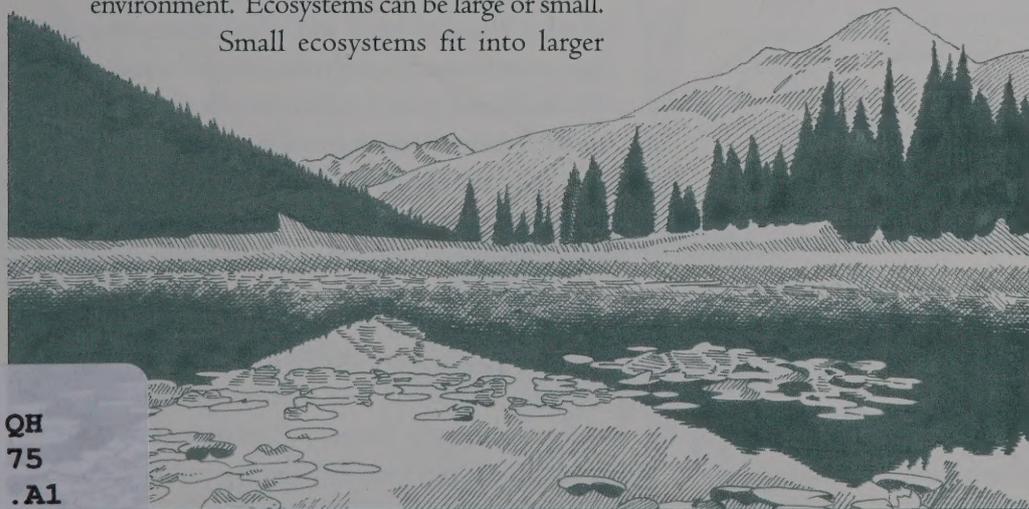
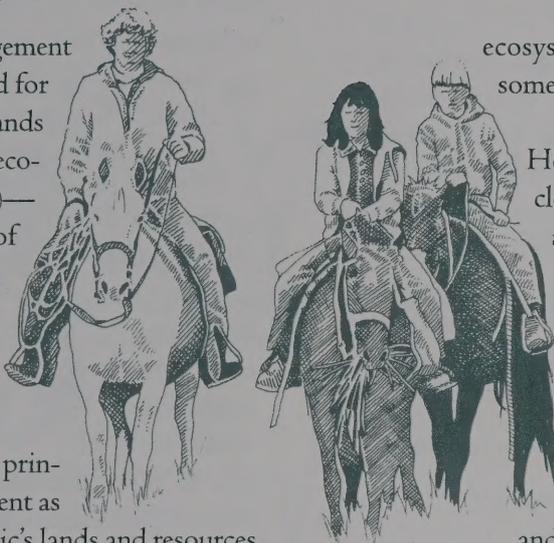
An *ecosystem* is a community of plants and animals (including humans) that function together in their environment. Ecosystems can be large or small. Small ecosystems fit into larger

ecosystems. Very large ecosystems are sometimes called ecoregions.

Healthy ecosystems provide clean, clear water; habitat for fish, wildlife, and plants; and way stations for migratory birds. They prevent soil erosion and help purify the air. They result in rich, fertile, and productive soils; higher water tables; greener streamside areas; more songbirds; stable streambanks; buffers for flooding; better fishing and hunting; a more resilient mix of native plants; increased productivity; healthier livestock; and disease-free forests.

Healthy ecosystems can help ensure that future generations can draw social, aesthetic, and spiritual benefits from the land.

Since ecosystems do not stop at traditional boundary lines, active partnerships are important. We invite you to "Join the Community" of people all over the country working to sustain healthy ecosystems for a better future.



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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR • BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

## Guiding Principles

In managing the public lands, the BLM will:

- Learn to live within nature's limits.
- Know the condition of the land.
- Use science to make informed decisions.
- Minimize impacts to the land and repair damage.
- Think in terms of the long-term benefits to society rather than short-term gains.
- Work with the public to develop common goals to maintain healthy lands.
- Use teams with a variety of skills to manage the land.
- Be flexible.
- Work with local communities to find solutions and resolve differences.

### Ecosystem Management Defined

In simple terms, ecosystem management means keeping environments healthy, diverse, and productive so people can benefit from them year after year. For the BLM, this means identifying limits to use and development of the land's resources and managing within those limits in order to ensure the long-term health and productivity of the environment. In addition, ecosystem management means trying to restore damaged land to a healthy condition.

### A Change in Focus

The major difference between traditional management and ecosystem management in the BLM is a change in focus. Traditional management decisions were

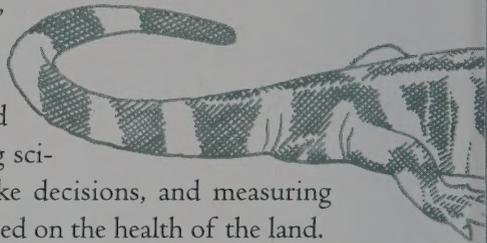
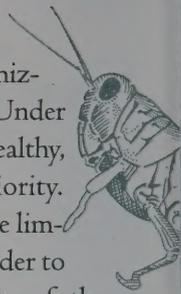
sometimes made on the basis of maximizing *short-term* productivity of the land. Under ecosystem management, sustaining a healthy, functioning ecosystem is the first priority. Other activities are conducted within the limits imposed by this overriding goal in order to maintain the *long-term* productivity of the land.

This new focus for the BLM entails managing on a broader "big picture" scale which will require working more closely with private and State landowners, forming more partnerships and teams, using science to make decisions, and measuring progress based on the health of the land.

### Why Now?

The effects of past activities on public and private lands have often led to degraded streams and streamside areas; unhealthy rangelands; degraded plant, animal, and fish habitats; and unhealthy forests. Human population growth, increased use, fire exclusion, flood control, and other factors also have contributed to degradation of the public lands and caused significant declines in the number and range of many plants and animals. If this decline continues, future generations of Americans will not be able to benefit from their public lands.

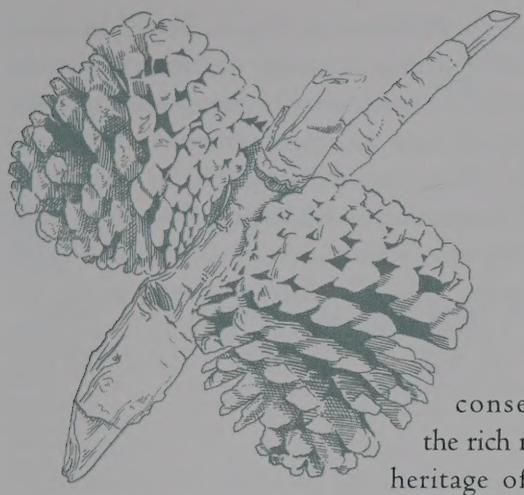
Furthermore, the intentional and unintentional introduction of exotic plant, terrestrial, and aquatic species jeopardizes the diversity of plants and animals ("biodiversity") on the public lands. For example, the infestation of exotic, noxious weeds threatens the



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conserving the rich natural heritage of each major bioregion in California while maintaining economic growth and development.

**The Applegate Partnership:** The BLM is an active member in this partnership which emphasizes direct participation by the community to achieve ecosystem health while fostering new economic opportunities for residents in the Applegate River Watershed in Oregon. This effort involves government agencies, industry, conservation groups, research scientists, and residents. The Applegate River Watershed encompasses approximately 500,000 acres, 31 percent of which is managed by the BLM.

**More Partnerships:** The BLM is actively involved in many other community-based ecosystem management efforts across the West, including the *Blackfoot Challenge* in Montana, *Owl Mountain Partnership* in Colorado, *Henry's Fork Watershed Council* in Idaho and Wyoming, and *Monroe Mountain Demonstration Area* in Utah.

**Rangeland Ecosystem Management:** The BLM is working with local communities and others to



restore and improve the health of the vast Western rangelands so they will continue to provide benefits to future generations.

**The President's Forest Plan:** The BLM is working with the Forest Service to implement the President's Forest Plan for the Pacific Northwest, which takes an ecosystem approach in addressing old-growth forest issues such as the controversy over protecting the northern spotted owl. A multidisciplinary, interagency team developed the strategy, which seeks to safeguard native fish and wildlife species while allowing for the production of a sustainable level of goods and services.



**A Cooperative Effort**

The BLM is not alone in developing and implementing an ecological approach to management of the Federal lands. The agency is working closely with other State and Federal land management agencies, Congress, user and public interest groups, and private citizens to further develop, refine, and implement the BLM's ecosystem management strategy.

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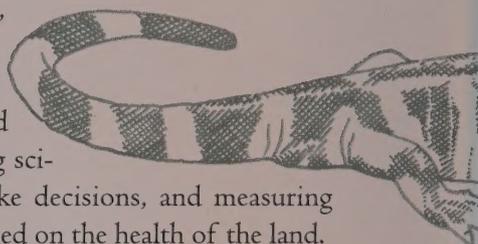
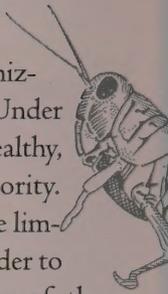
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health of the Western rangelands and the varied native plant communities. About 8 million acres of BLM land are infested by noxious weeds, which spread at about 14 percent per year. In other words, 2,000-3,000 acres of productive BLM lands are lost to noxious weeds each day.

**Often The Last Refuge:** Public lands often provide the last remaining habitat for many vanishing species. For example, over 191 federally listed threatened and endangered plant and animal species and over 1,100 species considered candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act are found on BLM managed lands. These lands provide habitat for at least 109 salmon and steelhead stocks that are threatened with extinction.

**Economic Stability Threatened by Degradation:** Communities whose economies depend on public lands are often the most seriously affected by environmental degradation. The declining timber and commercial and recreational fishing industries of the Pacific Northwest, for example, demonstrate the economic repercussions and social displacement that can accompany ecosystem degradation.

### Conservation Can Make a Difference

Conservation on public lands can make a critical difference to the stability of local economies. Restoring and maintaining forests, rangelands, streams, and streamside areas can boost the productivity and sustainability of ecological systems, benefiting people as well as plants, wildlife, and fish.



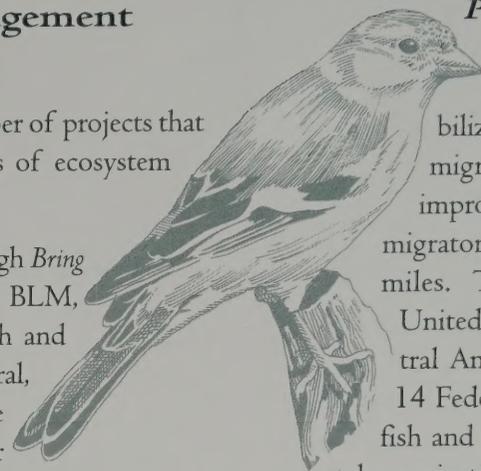
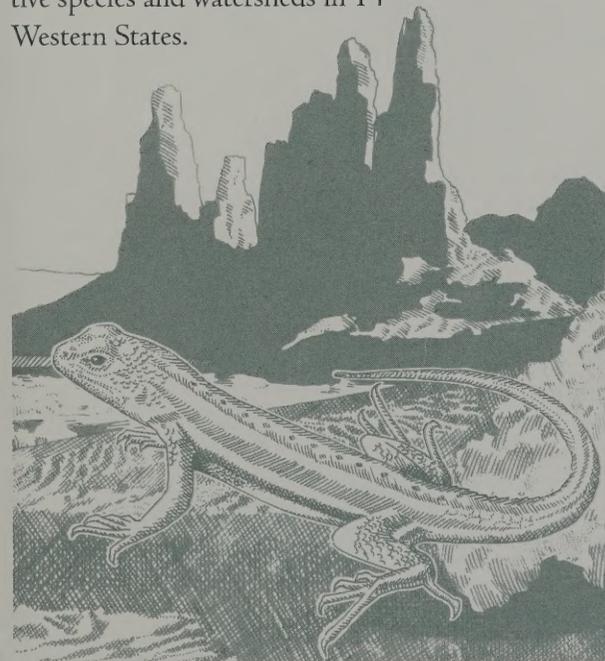
### Building on Experience

Building on experience gained from projects already in progress, the BLM is developing and implementing policies to help the agency manage the public lands on a sustainable basis. Some of the things the agency is doing include revising existing land use planning procedures; reviewing existing "standard operating procedures" to identify steps to conserve resources and minimize potential for long-term environmental impacts; establishing procedures to monitor ecosystem health on an ongoing basis; working with rural communities to anticipate changing environmental and economic conditions and to creatively resolve associated resource use conflicts; working with other agencies to develop the tools for ecosystem management; expanding the capabilities of the BLM's workforce through recruitment and training; and modifying the BLM's organizational structure to facilitate ecosystem-based management.

### Ecosystem Management in Action

The BLM is involved with a number of projects that exemplify some of the principles of ecosystem management.

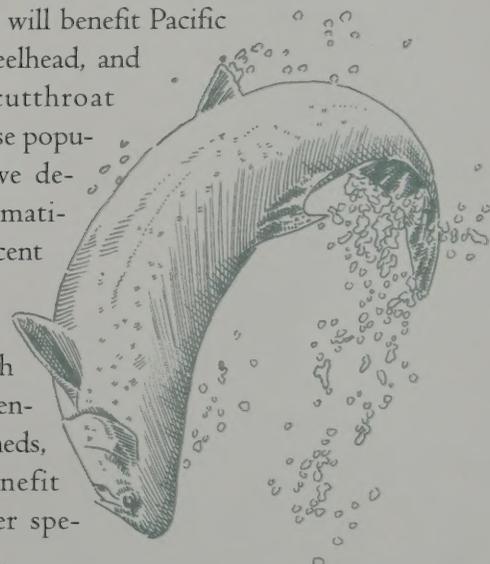
**Bring Back the Natives:** Through *Bring Back the Natives*, sponsored by the BLM, Forest Service, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, over 67 Federal, State, local, and private partners are restoring the health of entire river systems in order to conserve and restore native aquatic species. Private organizations such as Trout Unlimited and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation are involved in several site-specific projects. Because this effort takes an ecosystem approach—looking at the entire watershed—it will benefit a wide variety of aquatic and terrestrial species, including some that are threatened or endangered. In 1993, the BLM implemented 29 projects in 13 Western States. In 1994, over 50 projects are focusing on restoring native species and watersheds in 14 Western States.



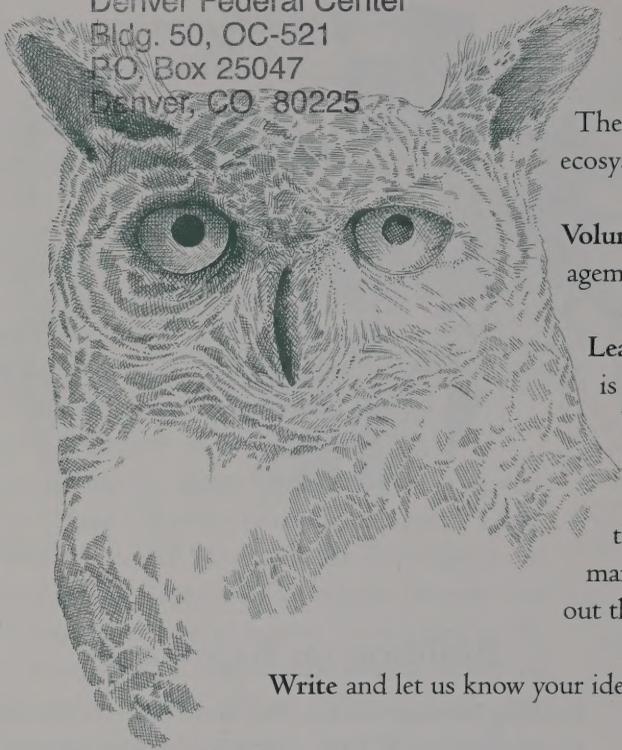
**Partners in Flight:** The BLM also is an active player in *Partners in Flight*, an international initiative seeking to stabilize declining populations of neotropical migratory bird species. The focus is on improving and managing ecosystems along migratory routes, some of which span 10,000 miles. This initiative involves Canada, the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. At least 14 Federal agencies, 55 State and Provincial fish and wildlife agencies, 34 nongovernmental organizations, and 14 private companies are actively involved in the Western Hemisphere.

**Pacific Fish:** The BLM and the Forest Service are also working together to forge a comprehensive ecosystem approach for restoring and managing aquatic habitat and associated watersheds on Federal lands in the West. The effort, called PACFISH, will benefit Pacific salmon, steelhead, and sea-run cutthroat trout, whose populations have declined dramatically in recent years. Since this approach addresses entire watersheds, it will benefit many other species as well.

**Bioregional Approach:** In California, the BLM has joined other Federal, State, and County partners in a comprehensive strategy to improve biodiversity. This effort is bringing the principal land management agencies together under the long-term goal of



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## What You Can Do

There are many ways to become involved in caring for ecosystems, at both the national and local levels:

**Volunteer** your time to a Federal, State, or local land management agency. There are many ways you can help.

**Learn** about the environmental issues in your area, what is being done about them, and how you can become involved.

**Visit** your public lands and experience their rich natural resources. The BLM has many fascinating sites open to visitors throughout the West and in Alaska.

**Write** and let us know your ideas about how we can do a better job.

### For More Information

To obtain the address of the BLM office nearest you, or to submit comments pertaining to ecosystem management, write to:

Bureau of Land Management  
Public Affairs Office  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

The Principles of Ecosystem Management are described in detail in *Ecosystem Management in the BLM: From Concept to Commitment*, available from the address above.

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